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The Crossroad. Chapter 3. What Lies Ahead.

Sun, 2015-07-19 15:19 — Robin Olson

(continued from [part 2](#) ⁽¹⁾ and [part 1](#) ⁽²⁾)

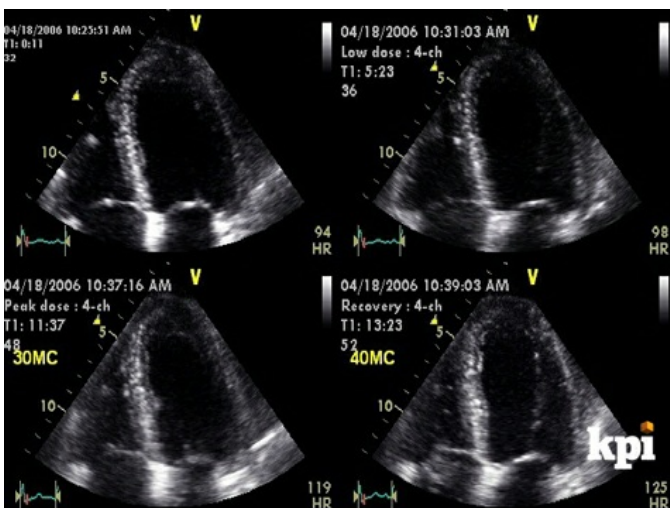
Lisa was the Tech. She was a pretty blonde with a slight southern accent. I tried to chat with her but she was all business. The room was not much nicer than the waiting room and certainly not any more cheerful. There was a treadmill flanked by two computers with a hospital bed next to one of them. Lisa told me to remove everything on top and put on a smock with the front open. I balked, being shy, and said I wore a sports bra thinking that the underwire from my other bras would have caused a problem. She apologized and said everything had to go or it could interfere with the test.

I did as I was told, trying to have an out-of-the-body experience. *I am not a fat girl, half naked in front of a stranger.* It was bad enough having to be naked at all. I wished I was home, scooping one hundred litter pans over doing this.

I knew seeing my boobs was nothing of interest to Lisa because she'd seen a million bare breasts before mine. She was very careful to keep me covered as much as she could as she wiped my chest with rubbing alcohol so the suction cups attached to the leads on the ECG would stay in place. She did her job quickly and effectively, then asked me to lay on my left side so she could take a baseline ECG and ultrasound of my heart. The harness was bulky so I had to move slowly. Once I got into position she warned me that the gel might be a bit cold. I didn't care. **I just wanted to live through what was coming next.**

As Lisa began to roll the ultrasound device into my flesh, I looked up at the screen and saw it moving in black and white..**my heart.** My little heart beating away reminded me of a [Kissing Gouramis fish](#) ⁽³⁾, gulping what looked like air, but I knew was blood. Very quietly I said; **"Hello, heart"** as tears filled my eyes.

And in that instant I fell in love. There was my faithful heart, pumping lifesaving blood throughout my body. I'd never given it much thought until now, yet there it was, doing its job, keeping me alive. I wanted to care for my heart, protect it. For the first time in my life I felt love for my body. It was one of the most *profound* moments of my life. I only hoped it wasn't too late.



I had no way to take a photo of the moment I saw my heart, but this is what a typical stress echo looks like.

Lisa explained that the cardiologist would be in soon to do the test. He would be monitoring me the entire time and that I shouldn't worry. Meanwhile, she handed me some paperwork stating the inherent risks of the tests, including **death**, and would I sign it please.

Lisa left the room for a few minutes. I sat on the end of the bed noticing a readout on the wall. It was showing the beats per minute of my heart: **110**. I didn't need to see that to know I was in a panicked state. I tried to focus on my Buddhist training; *settle your mind, let go of your thoughts.* My heart slowed down to 89, but only for a moment before it returned north of 100. **Pure adrenaline and terror pulsed through my veins with every beat.** Not much was going to change that.

The doctor came in and said hello. I told him about my concerns and he told me in 30-

something years only three people had been pushed into a heart attack and one died but they revived him. He must have told this to every patient because he was moving through the motions at a fast pace. He assured me not to worry and to step onto the treadmill. I was to walk at increasing speed and sharper angle to push my heart to a target zone. *This was it. Make or break.*

I started to walk and my heart felt all right. The doctor quickly increased the angle of the treadmill and I started to falter. I told him I had pain but it was coming from my gut and my lungs more than my heart. The aspirin had done a number on me and so had being sedentary for six weeks. **I couldn't do it. I broke out into a cold sweat and warned I was going to vomit.** He asked me if I could go another 30 seconds. I did, but in the end I couldn't reach my target heart rate. As directed earlier, I got off the treadmill as fast as I could and laid back down on the bed on my left side. I was panting, desperately angry at myself for not reaching the target heart rate, **but glad I was still alive.**

Lisa fumbled around, searching for a vessel for me to purge into while she mumbled about how *she thought she had one somewhere.* As I tried to keep everything down, she finally dug out a dusty rose colored plastic dish from the innards of a cabinet, placing it in my free hand that was out of the way of the wires of the harness. She quickly began moving the ultrasound device around my chest grabbing video of my heart. As she focused on her task, the doctor said, very matter-of-factly, as he left the room, that *he didn't see anything wrong with my heart and that everything looked good.* He went to fetch Sam as I laid there clutching the dish, trying not throw up.

I heard the curtain move and I looked up. Sam gave me a small smile and sat down, not saying a word. **He reached out and squeezed my toe.** I tried to smile back while Lisa kept making records of my heart, switching back and forth from one computer screen to another. It took about five more minutes until she was done. She gave me a towel to clean up with and said we were all set and I could **go home.**

I was done. I was okay. I could go home and watch the next episode of [The Bachelorette](#) ^[4] where Kaitlyn would continue to suck face with guy after guy; the romance of the show long gone. I used to love these trashy programs, but now I didn't care any more.

As I got dressed I held my breath. I felt shaky and stunned. I was certain my next stop was going to be Yale-New Haven hospital, not home. I didn't say anything to Sam until we were back inside his car. Once seated and belted, Sam fired up the engine. I felt cool air blowing on my face. I looked up to see more geriatric patients entering the building, but I was leaving. *I was going home.* As the shock of the past few days began to wane, I felt my body slowly rock back and forth as tears ran down my cheeks.

The next morning I got a call from my G.P.'s nurse. She said my heart looked fine so there was no need for our appointment on Thursday. I told her that I was still having chest pain so I was going to come in. After all this, I had no idea what was bothering me.

For the next few days I focused on my new eating "*lifestyle.*" I had to cut carbs very dramatically. I read that I should to try to keep it to about 50-55 grams per day. After a lifetime of eating a lot more than that. I had to work on portion control along with what I was eating. **I never even gave myself a chance to say farewell to my favorite foods. I just stopped eating them.**

I came up with a game plan. I'd work very hard to be careful for the next few months or however long it would take to lose enough weight to get out of the Diabetes-zone. I didn't even know how much I had to lose. From what I'd read it would need to be a percentage of my weight and that would be a good bit of weight. Ideally I need to lose even more than that. The painful truth is I need to lose at least 30 pounds if not 50 pounds or more. I couldn't look at it as one big number. I'd have to chip away at it. I'd do it reasonably and thoughtfully. I know I'd have bad and good days. I'd try to be as cutthroat as I could with carbs until I was out of danger, then slowly re-introduce SOME carbs back into my diet, as long as I was exercising (*which I hate doing-yay!*).

But what pained me more than changing my diet, was in trying to sort out who I was now. Eating is also a deeply social thing for me. I love to go out for breakfast with some of my rescue friends and we have a joke about how pancakes always soothe our souls. *Now I can't eat pancakes.*

I'm a "*Foodie.*" I love go on road trips and discover out-of-the-way diners, little mom and pop restaurants where the locals like to eat. I also know I use food for neurotic reasons like boredom or anxiety and God knows running a rescue means preventing stress-related eating is going to be a BIG factor...oh and I LOVE to cook. **What am I going to do?**

The best I could aim for is that I could do this for a few months, then maybe try to go a year, then maybe it would become my new routine and it would be harder to go back down that path full of sugar and carbohydrates since now I see what it will do to me...**but can I do it?**

Thursday arrived. It marked one week since I'd been diagnosed. This time I was anxious for the nurse to weigh me because I felt thinner. I thought maybe I'd lost a few pounds, but I prepared myself for only a pound or two. **I lost SEVEN pounds! Not**

only that but my blood sugar was normal. This was a very good sign that maybe I wasn't too late.

I spoke at length to my doctor and she admitted she thought I had agina and she apologized to me that she hadn't said something sooner. When I told her about taking so much aspirin she gasped. No wonder I'd been so sick. She can't even tolerate one baby-sized aspirin. I asked her to not hold back any more and to just tell me what she was thinking about. Hiding things from me wasn't working. I was figuring it out on my own.

We talked about the weird lung pain, gut pain, neck pain, back pain on walking up stairs or some other activities. **She said she had no differential diagnosis unless it still was angina and that was something I was not ready to hear. My heart might still be in trouble.**



©2015 Robin A.F. Olson. My new BFF. Fortunately for me, I only have to test if I feel woozy to make sure I don't have [hypoglycemia](#) [5].

She told me that angina presents very oddly in women and that if not angina I might have some sort of problem with my stomach or esophagus. There'd be more tests to do, of course, but I was worried about doing too much and making things get worse. I told her that over the two months it wasn't as bad as before and that maybe I should give it a week or two and see how I was feeling then. I did not want to take something to turn off the acid pumps in my stomach. I just wanted to give my body time to adjust. **I prayed that maybe I'd luck out and it would go away because one treatment for angina is the same as diabetes—diet and exercise. That said, wondering if I have a ticking time bomb in my body is no comfort. I just want to be pain-free and well enough to begin exercising.**

The problem is that I don't have a lot of faith in myself. As much as I love my heart (*my new BFF*) and treasure the health I have, I don't know if I can do this long term. I've already had dreams about eating carbs and repeated uncomfortable cravings. **That said, I know what lies ahead for me if I don't do it.**

I am NOT going to be a cliché: Middle-aged, fat, unhealthy, crazy-cat-lady. No. Get ready world. Some shit is goin' down in this town.

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Comments

Sun, 2015-07-19 16:56 — Gsquared Indy (not verified)

Carb Advice from a Type 1 Diabetic [12]

Hi Robin:

I'm sorry to hear about your Type 2 diagnosis but it sounds like you are definitely on the right path. Unlike you, I am unable to fix my Type 1 with diet and exercise. Here are a couple of things I've learned over the 34-years of dealing with a broken pancreas. I hope they will help you too.

1. There are bad carbs and good carbs. Try to focus on the good ones which are low on the glycemic index. You can Google these. Personally, nothing affects my blood sugars so adversely as pizza and white rice. Chinese food, in general, is something I had to give up.

2. Stay away from pre-packaged food and follow a whole foods diet. I hope you like to cook because that helps. My rule is if I want something bad, I have to make it and not buy it, such as cookies, french fries, etc.

3. Make things ahead and freeze them like brown rice, farro and other healthy grains. It makes it so easy to grab a cup for dinner.

4. Stay away from lunch meat. It is over processed with so many chemicals that are harmful. Lunch is always the hardest for me. I will usually eat a salad with cranberries and goat cheese. I make up salads and other healthy sides on Sunday for the week.

5. Finally, if you are having a difficult time losing weight, it may not be you. I found out just recently that my broken pancreas also does not produce 6 digestive hormones that are essential when signaling to your brain that you are full, as well as many other important digestive functions. Talk to your doctor about this and there may be something you can take, but first try to do what you are doing! It sounds like you are on the right path.

Best of luck with your journey!

Gretchen

Sun, 2015-07-19 20:50 — [Robin Olson](#) [13]

Thank you Gretchen! [14]

Thank you so much for the helpful advice. I'm very sorry your pancreas doesn't work right and that you have a very tough job on your hands. I'm going to be VERY sad about saying farewell to pizza, but I will find a way to enjoy it by making it myself-as you suggested. I just realized today that I am cooking a lot more than before. I'm not thrilled about it but it tastes good and I don't have to worry that I'm overdoing something. We checked our lunch meat because I was worried about sugar and sure enough the soak ham in it..even boiled.so we found a brand that was very clear of crap/sugar and I will only eat it in moderation. Right? Portion control..ugh! I guess I won't know if I'm having a hard time losing weight until more time has passed but right now the trend is down so that is good but it may not last. My best to you!! Robin

Mon, 2015-07-20 13:27 — Annalisa (not verified)

Good vibes from Florida [15]

I'm not sure if anyone has suggested this to you, but the website <http://www.100daysofrealfood.com/> [16] has wonderful recipes and suggestions--and it's all about non-processed foods. They recently came out with a cookbook too.

Good luck! My husband, our 2 cats, and I will be rooting for you :)

Mon, 2015-07-20 06:46 — GD (not verified)

Robin, I totally know you can [17]

Robin, I totally know you can do it because you have a goal that you care about! You will be amazed at how just the weight loss will affect so many things in your life in a positive way. Joints, cardio, energy, etc. You have so many people cheering for you. And think, perhaps your journey is meant to be the encouraging factor for others that are currently walking your same path. Sending you many hugs and will be cheering you on during your endeavor!!!

Mon, 2015-07-20 09:59 — Sam from Mexico (not verified)

I am praying for you my friend...I am living almost the same [18]

Hey Robin, this is Sam from Mexico city, I hope you remember me.

I was in tears when I read your diagnosis. You are one of those persons who don't deserve any of this, and I wanted to share with you that I am living almost the same thing. Last december I received the results of some blood test I had, and I was borderline diabetic. Since then, I am having a lot of stress at work and lots of worries with my loved cats...I have hypertension and lately I'm not feeling right.

I went to a new doc last week (my usual doc retired) and pending a new set of tests, he told me he was worried about:

- My prostate being too big (I need some tests to disart cancer)
- My sugar levels (He told me my symthoms could reflect that i am already a diabetic)
- My Hypertension being out of control

I have my next appointment next week, and I need to get the tests done...Robin, I am DYING with fear. I feel like breaking in tears several times in the day.

I am checking your site almost everyday for news about your health. I really hope you get better, and I hope we can talk in a couple years and remember all this as a bad memory.

Take care.

Mon, 2015-07-20 13:29 — jmuhj (not verified)

RE: CHANGES [19]

Some of what you write of sounds scary. But with your loved ones close, I know you'll do whatever is necessary to make your health the best it can be. (And on the lighter side, I can't eat pancakes, either. There's something in them that makes me break out in hives. Not worth it!)

Tue, 2015-07-21 23:05 — [Deb'n Cats \(not verified\)](#) [20]

Another POV [21]

First of all, *HUGS. Thank you for writing these posts. I hope that, by unburdening your mind by putting all this "on paper", that eases your stress. The aphorism "confession is good for the soul" really does work. This is like a virtual breakfast with pretend pancaks. (Can I have the ones you can't eat?)

Second, I think there are a large number of your audience who can relate to a chronic illness and the struggles that produces. With me, it's Rheumatoid Arthritis. Oh Robin, I can so, so, so relate to the need to lose weight to get moving. I have the extra issue of pain in my joints. Exercise will help, but there are days when it hurts to even walk from the car to the house after work. Why, on earth, would I want to force my painful knees and feet to haul myself, at best, around the block? And I've developed "cankles" which my doctor says I need to treat by elevating my feet. "Go for a walk and when you're done, elevate your feet," he says. But when your feet hurt.../sigh

Third, my resting BP is 108-110 over 70-80. My doctor won't give me a diuretic for my cankles because that would lower my BP, which is genetically low to begin with. Hence the elevating of the feet. You sound "normal", Robin. I'd be inclined to think something else is going on with the other parts of that system and not your heart.

Fourth, we're all pulling for you. We're all in this together, referencing item 2. I had so much pain when I was diagnosed with RA. It's taken 3 years to get the pain under control. I just got through physical therapy because I developed sciatica because I was walking "funny" because my knees hurt. The PT for the sciatica included helping me regain the right stride for walking which has the knee pain down by 95%. I am sedentary at the office. I need to develop some sort of walking around the parking lot program for lunches, which would help in the long run. It's getting the motivation because of the interconnectedness of it all. But, just this month, I have been able to string together 2-3 pain free days in a row, something I never dreamed would happen.

Finally, I predict, and I won't use the "magic 8 ball", that once one part of this gets better, other parts will start to get better. I have friends who maintain their diabetes by diet and exercise alone, no insulin. They did have to give up things they used to love. Due to my RA meds, I can no longer drink alcohol. These warm summer days have me aching for a Guinness. But I've decided that the huge potential for liver damage from alcohol is not worth the taste, so I just don't. I think you'll get there, too. It will be a long haul, but you'll get there.

The important thing is not to do this for Sam or for The Dood or Kitten Associates or Freya or all of us following your blog. You need to do this for Robin. When you say, "I'm doing this for me", it becomes incredibly easy to resist the pancakes. (Seriously, though, can I have your share? I love blueberry pancakes.)

Deb

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Robin @ [Google+](#)

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